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Chair: Mr. Messone (Gabon)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 55: Questions relating to information
(continued) (A/C.4/67/21; A/67/62 and A/67/307)

1. **Mr. Mwinyi** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the usefulness of the United Nations Radio service in Kiswahili, a language spoken by over 200 million people in Africa, was beyond doubt. However, increased staffing would enhance productivity and the quality and quantity of the information broadcast.
2. Given the importance of the activities of the United Nations information centres, any further rationalization of the network of information centres should be undertaken on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the Member States where they were located.
3. **Mr. Hamed** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation looked forward to a new world information order that would be more just, effective and responsive to the concerns of all peoples, instead of seeking to manipulate public opinion in the service of narrow political interests. The Department of Public Information (DPI) played an important role in reaching different regions of the world with the United Nations message of peace. Information was one of the most important tools at the international community's disposal, reflecting as it did the political, cultural and economic orientations of different societies. The revolution in modern communication media had so increased their impact that they no longer merely reported events but actually helped shape them. The negative role played by the media when they were not objective, however, could spread a culture of violence rather than of peace. Information must be conveyed impartially, free from politicization, distortion and falsification. In that connection, it was regrettable that some States had blocked the broadcasting of Syrian satellite channels, in flagrant violation of the principles of journalistic ethics and free access to information recognized by the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva in 2003.
4. The DPI Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine must be strengthened, given Israel's ongoing human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories, which included attacks against journalists and foreign peace activists. DPI must also achieve parity among the official languages of the United Nations and remedy the deficiencies of the Arabic-language website. Lastly, DPI could play an important role in encouraging dialogue and building understanding among cultures and peoples with a view to achieving such important goals as poverty eradication and decolonization.
5. **Mr. Diallo** (Senegal) said that although the countries of the South were rapidly embracing the new communications technologies, the United Nations should continue to support traditional means of communication, particularly radio. At the same time, the United Nations, development partners and concerned States should act to bridge the digital divide so that all countries reaped the benefits of information and communications technologies (ICT). His Government welcomed the frequent updates provided by the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine and noted that there were 63 United Nations information centres around the world, including one in Dakar, whose success depended largely on the quality and diversity of the products they offered. Lastly, multilingualism required constant support if the United Nations message was to reach all countries and peoples. He therefore encouraged the United Nations to bolster the human and other resources needed to bridge the linguistic divide in DPI and commended the interpretation, translation and verbatim reporting services provided by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.
6. **Mr. Iqbal** (Pakistan) urged DPI to allocate adequate resources to the United Nations information centres, particularly those in developing countries, and to consider restoring full services at the Islamabad Information Centre. The information centres were a vital source of information and helped bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries. He welcomed DPI efforts to provide information materials and websites in local languages, as well as photos and live video coverage of United Nations meetings. As a major troop-contributing country, Pakistan urged DPI to continue working with the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support to raise awareness of the realities, successes and challenges of peacekeeping operations. He emphasized the importance of accurate, objective and impartial news and information in print and on radio, television and the Internet and the need to strengthen technology, multilingualism and partnerships in those areas.

7. **Mr. Borje** (Philippines) said that although DPI had been successful in meeting the daunting challenge of the ICT needs of a diverse world and in making the United Nations more accessible, efforts should be made to bridge the digital divide. At the same time, the gaps in access to ICT in the world meant that traditional media remained a vital source of information for half the world's population.

8. His delegation welcomed the efforts made by United Nations information centres to establish partnerships with schools and civil society in order to step up information campaigns. Partnerships with educational institutions specializing in ICT and communication arts could harness the talents and energy of young people. The increased traffic to United Nations websites and press releases underscored the importance of United Nations news services, to which access could be improved by making content available in all six official languages. Such access should not, however, be at the expense of the integrity and impartiality of United Nations websites.

9. **Mr. Kyaw Zwar Minn** (Myanmar) acknowledged the efforts made by DPI in publicizing the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and many other areas of United Nations activity. The United Nations information centres and DPI websites and programmes also played a vital role. Everyone should have access to the benefits of ICT, and DPI could help bridge the digital divide. As DPI was the public face and voice of the United Nations, Member States should give it stronger support.

10. Reviewing the media and information reforms taking place in Myanmar, he said that the Government had relaxed restrictions on domestic publications and was working to ensure freedom of the press, in the belief that a dynamic media sector was crucial for economic development, national reconciliation and Myanmar's integration in the international community.

11. **Mr. Wolfe** (Jamaica) said that the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons posed a threat to the survival of countries across the world, including in the Caribbean region. He therefore welcomed the communication strategy developed by DPI to publicize the recent United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty. He also welcomed the documentary produced by DPI to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and urged it to also publicize the Third Global

Conference of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), to be held in 2014, in order to highlight the particular vulnerabilities of SIDS Member States, especially to the effects of climate change. His Government commended DPI information and activities designed to garner support for the project to erect at the United Nations a permanent memorial to the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

12. **Mr. Momen** (Bangladesh) said that his Government took pride in the fact that 109 Bangladeshi peacekeepers had died in United Nations service and would support any DPI effort to produce a publication or documentary on peacekeeping activities. Moreover, as a victim of the many frightening consequences of global climate change, Bangladesh urged DPI to spotlight the situation of developing countries faced with impending climate crisis, in order to mobilize international cooperation, support and preventive action.

13. His Government offered its assistance in publicizing International Mother Language Day. Commemoration of the Day must be more than a formality and promote awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity and the threat posed to many lesser-known languages by globalization and economic disintegration. In that connection, he noted that United Nations Radio broadcasts in Bangla, which had been popular with the over 300 million Bangla speakers around the world, had recently been discontinued. He urged their earliest possible resumption. Lastly, he welcomed the use by DPI of alternative media such as social networking sites to publicize anti-poverty and other campaigns.

14. **Mr. Ulibarri** (Costa Rica) said that freedom of expression and the full, free, transparent and multidirectional flow of information were indispensable for a healthy democracy and promoted development and creativity while helping to combat corruption. The United Nations must support the ability of traditional media to generate such information flows, while embracing the liberating potential of the new information and communications technologies (ICT). As part of efforts to achieve development, it was essential to reduce the digital divide both within and between countries. That required wise public investments in infrastructure, improved access, training and entrepreneurship. There were many countries with limited financial resources that, thanks to good policies, had made communications technologies more

accessible. However, there were also countries that, despite having the financial resources, had either failed to promote new media or had even censored them. The United Nations should support investments, multisectoral alliances, best practices and institution-building initiatives that would reduce the digital divide.

15. The United Nations must also enhance the effectiveness of its own communications. Despite a reduction in resources, DPI was achieving that goal through improved internal organization, better coordination within the United Nations system, the use of new technologies and the development of partnerships with the media, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and civil society in general.

16. **Mr. Yeo Sho Hor** (Singapore) said that access to information was a key element of both economic and social development. While new media and communications technologies had brought benefits in that regard, including an improved ability to connect with new audiences, interpreting the vast pool of information that had become available required discernment, namely, the ability to separate fact from fiction while increasing the transparency of information. The speed at which news was disseminated through the new media could also exacerbate conflicts. At the same time, disparities in the availability of information persisted in different parts of the world, sometimes even within the same country, and such information gaps must be narrowed. The United Nations had a very important role to play in promoting and ensuring the accessibility of information for both the information-rich and the information-poor.

17. His Government was using social media to engage the population directly in serious discussions. In addition, it had embarked on a five-year plan to increase the reach and richness of its electronic services and enhance electronic communications with the country's citizens, including outreach to those who did not have computers or Internet access.

18. **Mr. Ruiz** (Colombia) said that, while DPI and the Secretariat had increased coverage of the work of the United Nations, it was becoming increasingly urgent to take the United Nations message to all segments of the population, in their respective languages, including in remote areas or areas where access to the new

technologies was not readily available. That would require the implementation of innovative strategies, through national Governments and with the support of United Nations information centres, to involve local media and draw on the capacities of the academic sector and volunteer networks in each country.

19. The widening digital divide between developed and developing countries was cause for concern. Not only must current imbalances in access to the new information and communications technologies be corrected, but traditional media must continue to be used as well.

20. In March 2012, the Bogotá Information Centre had launched a nationwide radio programme that broadcast information about the United Nations and Colombian current affairs. It had also held 16 press conferences in 2012, on such topics as anti-personnel mines, the green economy and the International Year of Cooperatives, had updated its website, which in 2012 had received some 2,100,000 visits.

21. The United Nations information centres provided fundamental support to the work of DPI around the world. The potential impact on the centres of current budgetary constraints was therefore cause for concern. The Bogotá Information Centre served three countries and must continue to receive financial resources, expand its staff, if possible with the support of the United Nations Volunteers Programme, and upgrade its information technology systems so as to achieve sustainable results.

22. Since multilingualism was an inherent characteristic of the Organization's work, it was important to achieve linguistic parity among the six official languages, particularly in the case of press releases, which were often published in only one working language. His Government was committed to freedom of the press and freedom of expression and welcomed United Nations efforts to disseminate objective, accurate and consistent information in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

23. **Mr. Mashabane** (South Africa) said that, as the pre-eminent credible multilateral advocate for peace and justice, the United Nations must have a global voice. The DPI communication strategy should be central to the Organization's activities, as had been the case for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. He hoped that DPI would specifically

promote events focusing on regional matters, such as the Eighth African Development Forum and the 2012 African Economic Conference. He also encouraged DPI and the Fourth Committee jointly to explore possibilities for raising awareness of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism and commended the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine. United Nations information and communication activities in conflict and post-conflict situations could also play an important role in peacekeeping missions.

24. His delegation was mindful not only of the opportunities that ICT could offer for the poverty eradication, economic growth and social development, but also of the widening digital divide between developed and developing countries. DPI must ensure an equitable balance in the use of all available technologies. Traditional media remained important in many developing countries and it should continue using those outlets.

25. His delegation commended the work of the United Nations information centres, especially in developing countries, where the dissemination of information in local languages had the strongest impact. It also supported the decision to establish a United Nations information centre in Luanda to serve Portuguese-speaking African countries and hoped that it would soon become operational.

26. South Africa appreciated the support provided by DPI in 2012 in promoting Nelson Mandela International Day, an event that appealed to the international community to dedicate time to service for humanity. The network capacity of the United Nations information centres played a vital role in promoting the spirit and objectives of the international day across the world. His delegation was also encouraged by the efforts of the DPI Africa Section to increase online visibility and support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). In that connection, the *Africa Renewal* publication was invaluable in promoting awareness of the objectives of NEPAD.

27. **Mr. Pyvovarov** (Ukraine) said that there had been a significant increase in the quantity of information available globally and that managing it effectively was a challenge. Effective communication between the United Nations and the international community was very important for publicizing and ensuring the success of the Organization's work. A

well-coordinated public information strategy was one of the key elements in the overall effectiveness of United Nations activities and he thanked DPI for its exemplary efforts in that regard. He noted that there had been an improvement in the Russian-language news service and commended the excellent work done to host journalists during the opening week of the current session of the General Assembly.

28. Information must be objective, reliable and credible, given its considerable influence on the adoption of strategic decisions that affected millions of lives. The conflict in Syria was a striking example of how the manipulation of information and misinformation could have grave consequences and complicate the search for a solution. His delegation called for an end to information wars and for transparency and objectivity in media coverage of events in Syria. United Nations organs must use only well-verified, reliable information in their work and disregard unconfirmed, provocative reporting.

29. Journalists sometimes risked their lives to report on world events. A Ukrainian journalist had been abducted recently in Syria and the Syrian Government was actively assisting efforts to find her. Ukraine advocated freedom of speech and a free press and believed that information was a powerful weapon that should be used solely to promote peace, democracy, prosperity and mutual respect and understanding.

30. **Mr. Nakamae** (Japan) expressed appreciation for the cooperation received from the DPI Outreach Division on the occasion of the commemoration of the first anniversary of the earthquake that had struck eastern Japan. His Government placed great importance on communicating the lessons learned from the earthquake and its disastrous effects. At a time of shrinking United Nations resources, partnerships played a valuable instrumental role in ensuring effective and timely information-sharing that achieved tangible results, not only for the general public, but also within the political arena.

31. His delegation commended DPI efforts to improve the quality of the United Nations website and expected efficiency and cost-effectiveness to be taken into account when determining whether to make site content available in all the official languages. At the same time, it encouraged the Department's efforts to engage with new media platforms and called on it to

continue enhancing the efficiency and transparency of its activities.

32. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer for Palestine) reiterated the importance of the DPI Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine, which enjoyed broad international support and was instrumental in raising the international community's awareness of the issue, thereby fostering support for efforts to achieve a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. DPI was also continuing to provide media assistance to the Palestinian people through its annual training programme for Palestinian broadcasters and journalists from the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

33. The Israeli occupying forces continued systematically to target journalists who were trying to convey the grim reality of Israel's aggressive and destructive policies and practices against defenceless Palestinian civilians, including its campaigns of arrest and detention and the use of rubber bullets, tear gas and stun grenades against journalists covering non-violent protests against Israel's confiscation of Palestinian land for settlements and the apartheid wall. On 28 September, a Serbian journalist had been injured and dozens of Palestinians and Israeli and foreign activists had suffered severe suffocation when Israeli occupying forces had suppressed a peaceful demonstration. At the same time, illegal Israeli settlers continued their acts of violence, harassment and intimidation against Palestinian and foreign journalists with total impunity, under the protection of the Israeli occupying forces. He urged the Committee to step up efforts to protect Palestinian and foreign journalists.

34. The Palestinian leadership believed that telecommunications and information technology played a vital role in the development process. Although Israel controlled the communications sector in Palestine, including the Palestinian frequency spectrum, thereby depriving the Palestinian people of direct access to communications services and information technology, the Palestinian leadership was working tirelessly to build ICT networks to help the Palestinian people overcome the geographical and physical impediments to normal life caused by the occupation. His delegation reaffirmed its commitment to a peace process that would end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory and enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights, including the right of self-determination and the right

of return in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and the right to establish an independent State of Palestine and secure full membership in the United Nations, thereby taking its historical and rightful place among the community of nations.

Statements in exercise of the right of reply

35. **Ms. Abu** (Israel) said that it was absolutely absurd to hear the Syrian representative, a representative of a regime that slaughtered its own citizens on a daily basis, talk about human rights. She could also address the claims made by the Observer for Palestine by questioning his definition of non-violent protest or by discussing the treatment of Israeli journalists in the Territories administered by the Palestinian Authority and in Gaza. However, the discussion on the current agenda item was not the place to do so. There were several other items on the Committee's agenda dedicated to the Palestinian issue. Unfortunately, there were none to discuss the atrocities taking place in Syria.

36. **Mr. Hamed** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the misinformation provided by the representative of the Israeli occupying Power was no surprise. The international community was accustomed to hearing such accusations whenever Syria criticized Israel's human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. What was odd was that the representative of Israel should talk about human rights violations when everyone was aware that Israel had violated each and every human right. Israel had committed numerous violations against journalists and peace activists seeking to express their solidarity with the Palestinian people. Rachel Corrie, an American citizen killed by Israeli forces as she tried to prevent an Israeli bulldozer from destroying Palestinian homes in Rafah, had been killed for trying to convey the truth about Israel's inhumane practices. The killing of activists on board the Gaza Freedom Flotilla was another example of Israeli inhumanity.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.